



# NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY  
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

**TODD P. GRAVES**

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**NOVEMBER 18, 2005**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

VIPER UPDATE  
**FIRST VIPER DEFENDANT SENTENCED**  
**ASSOCIATED WITH 51<sup>ST</sup> STREET GANG**

**KANSAS CITY, Mo.** – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that an associate of the 51<sup>st</sup> Street gangs was sentenced in federal court today for possessing with intent to distribute crack cocaine and illegally possessing a firearm. Today's sentencing, Graves said, is the first case sentenced under VIPER, a new joint initiative with the Kansas City, Mo., Police Department to combat violent crime in Kansas City, Mo.

**Damon L. Johnson**, 21, of Kansas City, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Ortrie D. Smith this morning to eight years and one month in federal prison without parole.

On July 18, 2005, **Johnson** pleaded guilty to possessing with intent to distribute crack cocaine on June 1, 2005, in Jackson County, Mo. **Johnson** also admitted that he was in possession of a firearm at the time he possessed with intent to distribute crack cocaine on June 1, 2005. He admitted that he was in possession of a Ruger Mini-14 rifle. Under federal law, Graves explained, it is illegal for a person to possess a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime.

**Johnson** was originally charged on June 23, 2005, after law enforcement officers conducted a search of his residence. **Johnson's** residence was one of two searched simultaneously in the 5400 block of Michigan Ave. on June 1, 2005. In addition to crack cocaine and the firearm, law enforcement officers also discovered marijuana, ecstasy, a digital scale, a 9 mm pistol, numerous rounds of ammunition and numerous driver's licenses, credit cards and Social Security cards with different names associated with the 51<sup>st</sup> Street area street gangs.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Charles E. Ambrose. The case was investigated by the Kansas City, Mo., Police Department, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the United States Marshal's Service.

VIPER – Violent Incident Proactive Enterprise Response – is a joint initiative between the U.S. Attorney’s Office, the Kansas City Police Department and federal law enforcement designed to proactively combat violent crime in Kansas City by targeting suspected gang members, drug traffickers and other violent criminals brought to the attention of law enforcement officers as a result of a KCPD homicide investigation. The VIPER initiative was launched in April.

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This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at  
[www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow/index.html](http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow/index.html)